

THE MOON ON ALL SOUL'S DAY

I heard your hands (they were your hands) against the rain,
playing within the cruelty of insubstantial things, things
as they are. I heard that hill, I heard the grasses on that hill, you
go on now within me—growing through the bones, folding them
in, staining them green, my backbone growing green
from them. I felt the seasons of the north wheel in my gut,
felt soldiers in my chest, right here, right where—
I pulled my eyelids down into phosphenes and planes, freighters
with their crates of mail, toward port within
your voice, or if I flew anywhere, you would be
home, in air, or surrounded by bare trees in their loping strings
of light, the air wood-smoke, dark coffee, and a dusk
of wine, replete with beeping horns, shopkeepers sounding bicycle bells,
snows of oil-paint leaping from flat surfaces into your opened
mouth, for a day, a day

or two. I don't need much, and not much talk. The cold
my bones became: Mediterranean, deep with pulsing squid, fish
like skittish candy corn, electric eels—my blood in drowsy, final form
beneath the callused fingers of the summer sun—
no. Never sleep. Even blood spurts in erratic meter,
and it hurts. It must be electric, too, I know
how it will stop, where it will end—on the scarred letters
of my fingertips against your cheek. If not this face,
I'll wait. It will suffice. No—it hurts right here, just
like those liars said it would. Come. Please, come
inside. A chair for you. A chair for me. Don't speak
to me of home. Be home. Say what you will with me,
or go. Speak, and I will press my ear against your chest to read:
close attention to the fact: beauty in the crack of breaking glass—
on Pluto, far from the exploding sun, poems deep in black ice
of oxygen. Hold brother up like something precious
to the light. Sisters read their bodies through his lens. Hold
this body to the door and push as they explain
how different the fairies are. I smell the lilacs now, I smell
kerosene. The windows must be open, purple on the boughs,
browning in jelly jars, and the dog's bark, wanting elsewhere. Here—
I don't want your touch. I don't need the work. Each face I touch
twists a bit of blame. I hear your eyelids flicking shut, then open,
on my cheek. Oil on blacktop. Pennies everywhere. Newspapers
soaked in dog piss. You will not leave my skin, but tear the door away.

I. Sidekick

NUANCES ON A THEME BY STEVENS II

Among twenty snowy mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

White against white, curtains of white,
miles of what would be effortless, but peaks
jagged, the caravan pressing edges of white
against sunlight suffusing white sky,
the facets glittering, glittering,
the every color, Nothing.
Miles. And then we are winged,
but fall off alone, have no bodies
but might see, I, here, must be air
and see, swoop in, first
a speck of black, and then the blackbird
absolutely still, its cloak of black
hanging absolutely still, each feather
dagger-black, and then the eye,
black, head cocked to one side to see,
scanning twenty mountains with a twitch—
on the surface of the eye, all black,
reflected mountains, white on white,
twitching back and forth, jagged
saw-blade in which nothing moves,
the mountains, waves without
and imperfection, in the eye
you go forever in, there
there is no witness. Mountains. You
who is me, missing.

SIDEKICK

Take what little chance at form I have away.
Here: a body dressed in silks, revealing nipple,
then a hint of sex beneath the blue jeans, pulled
into a V at the slim hips, a vein pulsing

in his abdomen, the skinny kid, too soused
to stand dances, staring at my knees, maybe the package
in my pocket where my wallet is. God
doesn't see me with my fingers on the edge

his Adam's apple is—I would tear in
and pick that fragment of temptation, lick
blood from that bit of myth, bathe in that mouth!
If I were nineteen now, to be this body! If

I were seventeen, hoping to skirt past him
in the courtyard, by the stairs. Carry his books
while he is wrestling with the boy his teachers
take from him each day, in reprimands

or praise leading to uniform's fulfillment.
The kid who stands guard outside the door
when he is retching up the celebration. The patsy
nudging the shy girl, with her belly pierced, to him.

APOKRYPHA

The water is itself a bridge, crossing seabed to summit.
The rags he weeps in. Dragging among the breakers,
spreading from the fishing boats sharp against his soles. Coots

on shore, spitting toward the calm-eyed mendicant
scaring their catch away, the faithless starving, who knew

to snatch at his sleeves the sea would undo its chains
and let the silver inhabitants pour forth from his shoulders?
The flowering blood descending through the water.

Cormorants dive at the line of scarlet circles
stitching the water from the island. Sharks rise, snapping

at his footprints, swerve in, frenzied by the absence of a body.
In the sand, nails rust in the softened faces of the driftwood planks.
The young man stepping from the water turns his face

from the old men swatting at him with their nets, mocking.
He says, "I have been to the bottom, boys, there is no devil there."

MOONLIGHT REFRACTED IN A GLASS OF WATER

There was a moon. And then the moon had arms: vestigial,
grown into its flanks. Maple conflagration grasping for
the chimney. Smoke was everything other than itself.
Mating polecats. Soldier's hook. Talon of crow. I saw

the raven make his plan. Hawk is fine. A lonely bird
with so much hunt, all knowledge. I would be a bit like him, or him—
direct, not falling and/or hopping on the wind—
making swift the air with my red wings, just enough

to be a weather of my own. Will me this:
what the leaves were afterwards, what I walk through.
What in its odors of mulching catch at other scents—the ash
of timber, apples...dispelling sweetness as they pulp,

and who is walking then? In brocade—
skirts scratching against themselves as sprockets do.
Cranberries building with themselves inside the basket
make a sound like snowflakes after so much snow. And what

lies underneath? Grass. Dandelion. Weeds. The ones
who thrive are bent: crabgrass, clover, timothy. The bones of squirrels
and shrews that didn't make it through, that chirped
defiance at the south, and the old songs

of the south—that powder. The fingerprints beneath names.
My body beginning at the neck. Turkey racket
clattering above the poles, the fence up that steep hill, as first rain falls.
Their deep red throats, upraised, open. I dare

that rain to drown me. Today, I touched him. How he burned.

THE GEESE

Autumn. Geese are as the old men: crying after fools.
They do not know, being geese. Could you be tricked,
there by the water, could you be overwhelmed

by sounds the bees make? Ledge, let you look down
to where the ducks slept, loaves isolate
along the pier while two sentries threw themselves

into the current, feet first: the buoys of their bodies
tossed against their watch, against the pinions
of the river pushing what was left of glacial change

along. Love me, irradiate. Leave what you can.
The souls of old men pumping through a darkened web,
the quills flattened by the wind. What have these dazzling

birds to do with them, if not—? The geese
have been nobody else, and fly on.
Crying. Crying.

DEBTS AND PRIVILEGES

Morning. One remembers the watcher, then, remembers
having had a part in thoughts, dark or day there is no wing
for them whose hands were worn beneath another's hands.
Who had hands and held them to the sun to show that they

had stolen nothing to take with them into their sleep:

the dignity of graves, or dirt? Look to hems who never
will be free, each day a paper box pulled from a paper box
one day smaller. Therefore, days are thin, like shades
cupping yellow lamps above a table where he sleeps:
who you would have been, casual and quick, understanding doors

and keys as clothes and houses: space in which a body fills. Hides
of days discarded in honor of those skins. No matter how
you move, your body bending down in prayer to them.

SON AND SHEEP

The good son is someone else's son, resplendent
in paper, hands cracked with luminosity. The black sheep
creeps into his bed, nudges horns behind his ears. Sprinkles

judgment on his forehead from a snout and jowls
crammed with feed-grass. The good son is the tyrant
of the family, awarded with his middle age. He is doleful

in the caprices of the dancing fool whose heart
is each midsummer moon. Sheep drops
a brief reminder where the polestar dances on the ice. At night,

the good son cries at nothing like a serpent
mourns its feet: disdaining forward motion, his frame
merely a vessel for his appetite: quicksilver

tonguing the aroma of its meal into the tunnel of its speed.
His body and the meal are one, the to-be devoured
anxious to placate the open throat. Sheep

stumbles up his arm into his ear, licks up
the spilled forensics of the fatherless whim. He dresses
for his bed: the petrified skull of the fossilized tortoise,

the oven of the sun baking the skillet of the reptile,
and black sheep comes, sniffing the iridescent
jewels of his tailbone, grunting: birds will come of this.

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

I'll fall in love. Won't worry about work.
I have two shelves for food: I share the fridge.
I am grateful for life's little perks.

I like it rough. I'm not without my quirks.
One hand is missing when the fags play bridge.
I'll fall in love. Won't worry about work.

I'll watch him dressing as the coffee perks,
say, "I love this house! Honey, let's start kids."
I will prop his portrait on my desk at work,

office boys nudge me, "Who's that handsome Turk?"
Two punks tossed a faggot off of Petter's Bridge.
I'll fall in love, won't worry about work.

I have been weaned on fists, on slurs and smirks.
Chemicals: a half-life. Something someone did.
I am grateful for life's little perks.

Each mother's angel has his special quirks.
They drag the river near the Western Ridge
where I joined love, freed of worry, work,
drowned in the bounty of life's little perks.

II. Chameleon

THE MOON ON ASH-WEDNESDAY

Among the others, I am poorer, fearing love, and you are laughing.
I am noisy to forget that you are near, thumbprint of ash across your forehead:
darling in your humility, brave, a mortal sign of what it takes to thrive—
fragrance of paradise through fields of stone, radiant, angelic, and with a gust
gone, the stones without your light to honor them. You say, "Yes, you must,
you must go on." I say, "What I want is permission, yes, you've done
enough,

thank you. It's time you stopped." What happens is what always happens.
I say, "I have seen too much." I close my eyes, and "No, no, you must see.
See? You must"—and what he is, is proof: he. Any day, just a word enough—
"Is it all right?" "Yes. It is all right." "I like it slow." No, don't tell me
how you like it, I would be slow, I would be silent and move
like continents beneath you, or what is buried in them. Get off my body now

and let me be. He cannot read my thoughts—you search my face.
His lips hovering near mine, brushing them as I shift under you.
My work is done. Don't touch my chin, you touch my chin. Don't
touch my leg, you touch. I say, "It's late," he says his work #. I say,
"No thank you, thank you very much I had a lovely time goodnight."
To live is waiting for such light, I almost touch my hand against it, then it
darks.

EATING FRIED RICE, BY MYSELF, IN JANUARY

When I think of saints, it is the cloth
of their garments holding
dust from their bodies, wrapping them
in oil, sweat, tears
dropped for souls stubborn

at their money, urine...for I have
seen them: flinging their bodies against
walls, noodles, begging
the cracks in plaster: tell me this is
done. I hurt

for mortal answers. Here, in the back
by the ice-maker dropping its sheets,
how they will say anything, anything:
rags, parings, trinkets,
seeing others in the paths, hurried,
taking notes, glossaries themselves—
if only resting against
tables in politeness, leaving their arms aside,
baring their aegis: where the heart
pumps, naked within bones, where

the throat hums, open, allowing
the animal of thought to bark: see
the river? When we lived
there, we had no choice but to be
open. With our thumbs,
we must change its path. It is not possible
for you not to let you hurt me.
At least, this life is one that I
will wake from. Knowing this,
and ignoring it.

I want to scoop my eyes out with these spoons.

POEM FOR A THEORETICAL CHILD

I hold its body up to the tapping of his chest,
its periwinkle ear against the sweatshirt's "M":
we are not at work today. Its fingers flip
the red plaid collar up, part the hems. The buttonholes
are as dolphin eyes, diving the megalopolis

of whinnies, beeps and squeals beyond the human range
of hearing. I feel its fingernails, slivers of horn,
pierce the skin above the bones within his throat,
translucent moons, the second eyelids of snakes.
I will have to teach this little thing to fear for its own

sake—not everything: balance. The chalky heads
of matches, telephones in lightning storms, its appetite
and voice in comparison with common good. Fury
in its Trojan horse of masterly concern, unbridled
discernment. Its body, in his arms, full of little boy,

is nearly nothing. I have held a helium balloon. If only
this charge would rise into the air if he let go. If only
this man had skin, the spirit of an element, always
arriving. If only my voice would vibrate there,
in exaggerated baritone create a human drum, then cleave,

leaving an echo, a smudge of powder dropping through
the air. I would be held in one maker's choice
of color: brown eyes, the olive lips. My progeny
neither book nor baby and my love is never mine:
soul in soul, one instant shattering, He is only

human, learned his body through the voices
of his mothers, and his fathers. And me: a lungfish
hibernating, baked into the clay mold of an evaporated river.

PIG IN STABLE

O god, they're gone. I'm not
sure why I'm writing this. I'm not
sure why I'm
writing this. I'm not sure why

I write this. What
would you have me be? What
would I do to lift up from this book
and run. I'm uncled tom,

Christ!— piece to you all, I break,
I break and take to form
sugar in your mouth if I'm well chewed,
enzymes—God,

give your son to me, make me this
what?
This talk? This arc beneath which
the zoo passes, chattering

and shitting on their feet:
make due. In His house, the bumbling
mortals make their plea,
eat from his fingers at his feet,

and yes, this pig, yes this pig, yes.

GAMELAN

Rock without my heart, accept whatever beats: rain, earth-shift,
body cracked by heat. Men who would be here: that is what I think

of empty streets. Women who have not been fed. The gingkoes
are plump with spring, their ancient, fanning leaves

plaintive as money. Man, blinded by the sun, smiles to have known his sight

and turns over to brush his lips against the stone: fool who made

this hill, forget. The tantrum where the wind slips in
to feel its body's shape, the dust—annoyed to frenzy by what digs.

Beating the faces of chanting men hoisting carcasses
with swinging heads. Their feet pounding on the sand to be geniuses of rain—

to be the drag of fingers down their throats, to kiss what I could take
with them into the night, the indigo that seeps from the folded wings

of the butterflies licking banana rot, that completes the jagged puzzle
of the tigers. I cannot hold their bodies back from merriment,

I cannot burn for them, who have enough of heat. I'd ask the boys
to throw me to the curs and blame me: accident. Cat who caught

the fox plays with the blackbird's meal. Fee for what the skunk would hide:
the fox' stink. Doe without her eyelids bows before the buck. I know

nothing of them there. I don't know what they ask. Nobody moves
that doesn't beat the dust. We are victorious, moving in to speak.

CHAMELEON

I am a map, inconstant
currency, true only through

belief. This I believe. Goalless:
goldfish. Free: parrot's voices

dressing up as other sounds,
but only screech

what gives: syntax without

intonation. If I spoke not

what you spoke, but
how? How

you'd shake. The devil:
he would do this, mirror

facing mirror. Fake. The demon
does escape. Flesh that is

glass sympathetic, and pulls
what happens underneath it

up. Primitive protections. If
I were safe, farthest

only from free, I would
not trust the image or the way

it flings things up. I would reflect
fear, not redundancy. Kids

reaching to snatch my body
would see their faces

looming in my back, swollen
in the bumpy, bell-shaped

pads my feelers were. I would
give what I get.

JANUARY ON THE SHARP EDGE OF THE YEAR

I.

Winter in the provinces, and late. Men,
mostly, have slid into yellow cabs,
glide down snowed-on streets
beneath the fever of yellow lanterns

from their roofs. A mini-van. An orange pill—
somebody smoking behind tinted glass
in a Corvette. Bobwhites, or probably ice
dripping from the concentric silver circles

of an exhaust fan, chirp a song,
or something delicate, unstable
in this temperature. Cracking.
Another taxi: this time, red, splashed

with grit. If I stood still
and closed my eyes, I would be blind,
the air pulling salts from its pockets,
daubing my lashes and my lids.

II.

In the bush, the salamander
rolls the globes of its toes

across the match-heads
scattered by the grocer

as he fumbled in his pockets
for the powder.

III.

Powdered bleach smelling of lemon,
bathroom tiles with lime. The most beautiful
men I have seen have been in Laundromats,
reading paperbacks: men with auburn hair,

tousled from sleep, in tuxedos, tattered
tee-shirts, whatever garment happened
last, scratching their bristled chins,
watching robins hopping through dust,

or snow, scraps of fresh bread, swerving
to earth, camouflaged in themselves,
reappearing against brick before
adding to the streets its mail.

IV.

Honey, what books

would you bring to that deserted island
where you will be left

for always and always?--Please,
promise. One book: my body
with a gnashing reef around me.

V.

I watch my hands crawling across his face,
thumbs lolling for water. My wrists
brush the stubble of his chin,

twisted chords pulling whiskers with them.

I am thinking about a woman on the subway,
poking her fingers into the mouth
of her infant son: the baby smiling,
snapping to catch the fingers, munching

down on them. Then, they changed places:
her face rolling, a chewing sunflower in wind
around the baby's pudgy fingers batting
for the mouth. *Is that so? Coos, Is that so,*

and the kid balled his hands. The woman
opened her mouth, swallowed
a fist. Painted lips peeling
from the infant wrist.

VI.

The bride chomped a cigar.
"Got it from the old man. He was
shouting at the cheese trays."

I scrambled in my pockets, tried lighting it,
failed. Gave her the book. "The bastard
could have asked her not to show."

*People do the best they can? There's
medication, now? Have you heard the one?*
Bled of distracting tactics,

I pointed at the clouds, pulling
across the sun. Said: *Why, sleeping
on sheets your grandfather purchased*

*with his first silver coins, nothing
moving in the house, walls creaking
under snow, even then, you're doing OK,*

*kid, considering
everything you're in is blue,
or borrowed.*

VII.

The tapped strings buzz. A lot of divas
made their dough from you:
you shimmied through your twenties,
sit waiting for a song.

When the apple dropped,
the faces you had strung across the ceilings
were torn down by kids in leather,

skinny in mascara, defecting

your expression of perfection. Tony,
still sticky with chartreuse at the bar,
slaps hundreds of ones against the mats.
Are you close enough? you ask,

he shakes his head. He knows
what money's missing. A cult
of Adonai, Ganymedian glossy,
won't go easily against the bristles

of the broom. Frustrated, you collect
cups awhile, dumping swizzle sticks, limes,
cherry stems into a pickle bucket.
Buffet this year: bust. You sweep

and scrape the cardboard beauties'
gleam of eye, clenched bright teeth.
Every one you manage into piles. It's dawn.
You sweep, to find no floor beneath.

THE SNOWFLAKES' DILEMMA

We are snowflakes, but we turn
into snow, or rather, gather into something
bigger than the angel's pin, the blackbird's wing,

bigger even than the breath of Christ
swimming in and out of parishioners. I am
sorry for flowers,

dead ones, hanging their bonnets over
the throats of plastic vases, gagging
for air. Why, where are the bees? Where

are the beefy deer blinking innocently
as they crush me under foot?—This is what

I would say if I was a daisy.

I am a snowflake, at least I hurry
to earth and have my way with the moonlight
and high winds fusing me

to chums surrounding me, arrogant in their facets.
Yes, yes, we are ones of a kind, yes, what lovely polygons, what splintered
crystals we are composed of, but Mary, we are melting.

STRIPMALL

In the suburbs, there are no ghosts,
only mortgages. Enamel pigs with sticks
in their snouts, their wiggling tails

suspended between their hind legs, happy
to be saved here. What we leave behind us when we go
is what is borrowed:

the earth, shifting under plates
of names and the shadows
of administrations—what the earth

will give, and therefore lose:
morning-glories pulling nameless
from the buds like babies from their mothers

hung on green ropes from the houses, where
the men sit at the tables
banging on the plates with knives to be boys again, begging

for a nickel, for a kiss, a hand. To be handed to them, free,
unlike their souls, the sieves of winter gardens
dripping from the glass.

When they are hungry enough, they will go
to the window, press a picture
of themselves into the frost to show their children where the host is blowing.

THE MONK'S COMPLAINT

In the forest, there a pretty birds
aware of god within their songs,
dripping sharp and jeweled wings.
In paradise, I will lounge on sofas

constructed from their skulls,
propped up by their beaks. Animals
are bad, they don't use soap. I wish I had
a mallet and a hunk of cheese.

Perdita shouldn't be so small. I'm sick
of hoisting crates for her: she is too
old. The effects that she has misplaced I keep

inside a box, tucked inside my desk:

spools of thread, the studded collar
of the altar boy: how she frets remembering
to witness her miscarriages. The boys are tossing
salamanders between them in the creek. And yet,

they cannot parse a sentence, have no idea
where Pakistan might be. There is nothing
holy to their revel: when I hold them
by the shoulders, I can feel their bones sliding

in their sockets, scraping translucent skin. I love it
when their eyes snap. I watch a one man puppet show
within my bath, nap, dry naked
in my coffin. I don't like fish,

or Fridays. In silence, everyone is wrong.
Without my voice against my lips, I can't hear
what it is that I am thinking. I peel those red
socks from my feet while the joint is foaming

into meat: thinking of the volume
growing slowly in the drawers
beneath my cock. When I drive,
I close my eyes and make a wish.

PERDITA'S REPLY TO THE MONK

Fire. Mugs of tea and curls
of cinnamon inches from my eyes: fish with lanterns
on delicate reels aligned between their eyes, or black
spots that generations back contained their eyes, dangling

near their mouths. Quarries drown green husks
that once were men with burnished copper faces. Chisels
and forks crumbling into rust beneath the spit
that has fallen through the eaten body into the rib-cage

tent-spokes of an antelope. The quarrymen must have
been standing with their plates above the carcass when
the mountain cracked, scoured away horizons on all sides.
Molten beetles jealous for their catch, nibbling

erratically at flesh, wood, strips of rawhide swinging
in the emptied tents. Fire, then hissing rain, trapped

their hunger in frustration. I was a pretty girl, you see,
I knew it. Believed the boys offering their apples,

cupcakes, the brave, thin wounds their kisses were. Swatting
at each other for the pissing of the bush. What could I do?
Fool them into thinking that I was shy? I was not shy. I cared
little for the games of girls, or boys. I wanted Joshua the Christ:

held my fingers to the snow, eyes closed, to feel the miracles
of crystal ingenuity destroy themselves against my flesh.
I scoured my hands with milk—the calf, that heavy year.
Animals were made for human mouths, and human mouths

for prayer to baby Jesus. I am old, and little of what I have had
has been good to me. Listen to my prayer, brother: I am
old, want not to waste another instant of my angel's
memory on you. We have been chatter, argument and plea. I have

a window, too: what sounds would these two teen-aged
spike-heads skating by surprise themselves by allowing
free? Angels, certainly. Swallows of a haunted cry,
from the barely parted shadows of their lips—or that girl,

lugging her Elmos to the mausoleum birdhouse—
who will she learn to be? Will she care that what is Gospel
is translation, that the continents are gnashing
at each other, thrusting up mountains where they catch? Will she

ever know that fish crawled up into amphibians, into reptiles,
swelled into dinosaurs that winnowed into birds? That birds
as big as zeppelins heaved wings over the pampas
with grizzly-sloths drooping from their beaks? The pick-axe

of the hummingbird! Will she hear discarded
Lilith moaning in the throes of childbirth, midwived by the wind? I hear her.
Hear her batwings beating at the moonlight for an updraft,
the thumping of her shrew-nose sleeves, umbilicus swinging from her teeth.

III. Judas

FAUX FAT TUESDAY: MOON

Hunched in street clothes, I enter masquerade. At the punch bowl,
Harlequin chews a ball of string that Tigress, with her scarred chrome claws,

has spent the stalking hours of the afternoon imagining. Ghost
seeps, bald knees from its sheet, corner floorboards, counts popcorn
in a blown glass bowl. Ice cube, incapable of melting, melts,

wanting sacrament placed upon her tongue. Over rum, two Beatles
and an astronaut haggle over the sense of sound. I cannot breathe.

I cannot see their eyes; so, perhaps I am at ease. A shout. Guffawing
from a trunk—a marionette ascends, hinged jaw knocking. A mask falls
and I see the inwards of it: bowls where eyelids go, the nose,

the indented wings of lips. Beneath it: no edges to periphery,
surface and socket mirror and refract sharp motion. I leave,

punt gravel, snatch at bodies from my breath. I hear the baseboards creak,
corn husks rattling and scraping: mice divvying a trove of beans. On a hill,
headlights swell and shrink, leaving two red pulsars, drawing off.

Then, the moon again.

NORTH

The brick streets hump up
through the blacktop
like stout carp with rusted scales. A lunatic,
set free from asylum
in the north, pounds at the edges

of a sinkhole with a spoon,
howling for love. The blander,
dead at center madmen
stare through folded fingers
at the benches, their jagged teeth

yellowed with whisky. They seem
to know that a child
would have thought to knock
those teeth out to inspire fear,

if that man had been part
pumpkin, but fear's inside. The same child,
asked to draw a picture of its future
tears the page in half and scratches

(in black wax) an anvil

she has stolen from a story about horses.

JUDAS BARKS

Did you walk on water because light did? Pressing up against the dark
—weightless—waving from the edge—combusted from the pull

of particles in stars? Why did you walk with them who would take
from you your only gift, this body? Did you amaze them with some feat,

or hurt who certainly would drown? Would you walk in this, a fire, a garden
filled with the glint of silver in my shaking fingers? With a light

crowding what sprang from your mother into itself? What if, in the desert,
you heard no voices but your own? They would take you anyway—

the glitter of minarets, a light without interruption, one, a wheel
of years in which you waited to be crushed. Was it not you waiting to be born,

who touched the eyelids of them sprawled beneath the tree, and stole from
them

the certainty of beasts? Yes. I think of them now, who danced beneath your
glances

like puppets. I hear the wind, and on the wind I hear the rain,
and in the rain: the moan
of dogs, and barking, but what else would dogs be doing? Besides
lifting legs or squatting

low to piss, besides scratching at dead trees for something delicious in its
rotting?

They have battled at their genitals already. I see their faces, friend, their
snouts

with brittle skulls beneath, their mouths snapped shut under the ground
without their tongues to drool them cool. I am old, my eyes blind beyond the
help

of any glass. These bones will look like any bones, staring me into what
needs them.

ORPHEUS AND ENVOY

I.

Everywhere I hear the plucking, plucking, plucking of his fat thumbs
on the catgut. Lost in willow-switch, sight's blurred with whisking.

Leaf eyes spin gold light that sets fire to the river. Rain batters dust,
desiccated roots, mud mountain rampart. The serpent, drummed

senseless by his singing, bites its tongue. She combs freckled
fingers through the grass, while he preens, surrounded

by his zoo: the wishful beasts: the lion, ibis and quagga, the hare
that bats its feet against its long ears to keep rhythm

with the boyhood guessing at lament. Swoon and starlight
on soft skin, a brevity of kiss. I could have killed him,

but I waited. The girl tore the dwarf bush by its roots and snatched
its blossoms off. Far off, the great stones rolled about him, weeping

sediments. Bending to charm the bobcat with the titmouse in his teeth.
Am I to pity the idiot at her feet as she lifted the branch heavy with blossoms
—let go—

watched that arm dip, then spring an arctic of white petals, married
at once with the light—her body jerked a little and then fell

beneath the blades. I do not harden for the shadow of the dead girl,
nor the frenzied practitioner of veils still thrashing. I am velocity, seen

where light fails in the branches. Waiting for his lesson, knowing
that he will fail, sweeten, to be torn up, meat for priests.

II.

Come here. Listen. He pats the stone beside him
like an uncle with a fable and a hide-bound blade. I am a rustle

in underbrush, my feet tracks where grass crushes. Scrolls
of smoke in gold light, dust and spore, brushed

from the open throats of the mountain lily: he spits at me to make me
visible, jerking in midair. Running his left hand's first fingernail

against the strings beneath the bridge: the high-pitched, tinny zither.
I want to grind my heel into his mouth, let sharp wings have at him. Instead,

I grab his face, fingers cupping his chin, my thumb
pressed underneath his lip, pull his mouth slack, and I lean in

to kiss him. Tongue his tongue and teeth, lyre clattering

amid snapped wires: adders sleeping in the sun. *Enough
of what you weep, be silent. Follow me.*

III.

It would have been better to have been one
of the major characters—what can one say to the body
in the road? Go home, impatient fool? See, even the stones

at his feet will tire of his lament... can't he see peace
beyond frenzy? He cannot know the fingers that will tear
larynx from his throat, sent glittering down—singing now, praising

the fortuitous asp, the moon, and drought for kindness, and silence...
for a thousand arms, men not of muscle, but of afterthought. I tear wings
from my ankles, brush frost from these apples

and bite. I taste the fruit myself. I stand here, free of tongues,
finally, my ears—what will my mouth say? I am not him. I carried the rod
from which the serpent slipped. You will not find me

weeping for the eyes painted on the wings of those hideous, silent moths!
Nor will you find me—the eyes of owls and wolves flash as I pass.

SCARECROW'S WALTZ WITH SUNFLOWER

A yellow plain in molten light. Not you, shadowed black and red
as eyelids shut against a fire: fine nerve-lace against the spreading blood-
flash,
your shadow spreading thinner in the slow recline of sun. The stalks of grain
here once were green, but long cricket-clicking nights have faded them:
a shallow socket of dark water, nearly depleted of its shoe black sky,
its guilt of stars. Clear air now stalling in storm, crushing spaces.
As I turn, the sun's view changes you, you brighten—hand
held beneath water lit from the bottom, stalk of corn among your children.
I am nothing but the moon, slowly revolving in your stare,

doubled, laying its silver fossils in your eyes to cry up through the earth
to make a tear creep toward the sky, but we do not touch. My voice,
a rasp of straw, my eyes an opal swinging from your neck: your eyes
in the shadow, mineral, pearl buttons sewed on. I am turning
but you do not move. I stop. Now we stand in each other's shadows:
the seasons our sun. The moon's a field left browning in dim autumn,
harvested, waiting for spring, using these rust blankets and white quills
for waiting. Stranger in your hair, puzzle, cipher, we collapse.
The jackdaw guffaws on my shoulder, but spares you.

GREED

When we kiss, it will be the enemy meeting: truce
on lips. When we touch, I can blame you
for missing ten summers. Now, the fragrance

of the snow is strung with ghosts—

*a mother standing
before the mirror of pneumatic doors, white paper
bags with thin rope handles kicked sideways
from her feet—*

membranes in my nose freeze, my ears
burn, but the sky is clear. Starlight needle-tips
are infinite spheres—

*dim rooms, sparkling cotton
fog drifts islands of enormous packages. Elves
and lambs terrified into hides of Styrofoam. Spastic
angels jerk stiff hands at silent tambourines. And cold—*

*peeing my disdain into corrosive air. Herons
of newsprint swooping through bald trees, my water
freezing upward, almost into me, adhering me
to lichen maps on elms. High winds flick the bristles
of the neon red Revere-Ware stallion galloping in place.*

*I could have thrown my body down within the wish
that she could die a little quicker, that the blue
canvas bank bag stuffed with foreign coins
would come to me. Dropped, I'd shatter on the path-stones, reek
rising from the shards like black and blue balloons,
my soul a tangled string—*

When I see you, it will be
your hands I recognize, a nervous tic, a wrinkle,
as I crane my neck from the window of the speeding train.

There will be children splashing galoshes in a scarlet puddle,
prisms pulsing from the forehead of a struck classmate.
A dogcatcher will be threading the eyelet

of a hemp loop with his throat. I will remember you
as rage when I am folding boxers underneath a naked bulb,
when my eyes rise to the bills waiting for me in their slots.

THE DOGWOODS

The trees are like young women: growing old. There is no moral
to the rain, that comes and goes, that rolls winking from coffee spoons
in Switzerland, that rises from Brazilian aviaries in an eagle's muscled wing:
having been rain, having been dishwater, rivers, sea, or the blood

of young women, growing old. Unlike water, are they sense,
culling in the planet, piece and fragment, light and sound, taste and ache?
They keep God company, come home with what they learned,
with what they loved, adding in part completion of the whole

that God had been. Young women dead keep holes in Him.
She is at her window, looking down. When she dresses, wears a cloth
like this, parrot green with bursts of red, sewn together with a seam
of black. She will stand naked dressed only in a sound, the thin wish

of bare branches tugging the thin blue fingers of the coming winter
closer. When she dresses, sometimes she dresses down: a bit of brown,
as if the earth that she was drinking from had turned to her, afraid,
and curled inside: a little bald, a bit wild with birds, invisible behind branches,

twittering frantically. Wings arcing at approaching rains, eyes still arcing at the clouds for hatchlings, blown away. Work and war are in the leaves, and men are as women are: learning how to stand even as the trees are standing. Still. Wind scattering their thoughts like snow.

EVENING CLASS WITHOUT A TEACHER

"To be new is nothing new, you know: old hat, as they say. To say the wheel is old, well then, so, try to roll your vehicles away on cubes. For me, respecting an uncertainty, each day a proof, surviving and/or specific hours closing in to edge—and syntax, what? Is it

its fault I creak a little in the shower as I lather up to singing? Rhyme: postponing the inevitable, but, then so is breathing." The light is yellow on our talk: grasping, fingers twisting at the air to make light work. "I'm sorry: I have been too quick. I weep, because I have no heart. Well, yes,

I have the thing, the pound of steak, that fistful of pods inside a matchbox house that has no windows, or rather its curtains fly out from them: indigo and scarlet kites, that pull themselves into my blood, bang back into the glass again."

I weep conceit, but spend my days preparing ways to speak—I would like to think that I am a frenzied fist: "You see, I am too many, scattered on three continents, an address. Don't want what I have, friends, I want to want nothing, to let go! I have heard

that joy is rowing in a dream, and dream a secret that I must read

that's written on my lids." I see more clearly in a half-light:
dog flinching at leaves, blinded, seeing the forest for its scent:
the blood, the bone, the heaps of woodworm duff. Cracked lark egg.

Growling at the trunk of every tree anciently pissed upon,
needing no guide but its hubris, confused by territory without name:
Wind has wrestled the maps of smells away. I know why I speak like this:
the measured words, which is how nobody speaks. Frequencies

reveal themselves to me in sleep. But I can't sleep, and so I write:
here—the knees of children, speckled with mud, the shine of rain,
as flashlight on buckles, beneath nodding jonquils, umbrellas.
Knew were yellow, like a kid's slickers, but were seen as gray.

I remember them. And here—a moment at a door: a hand
pulling a head back into view, a remark timed practically with the echoing
of a joke, endured long enough for hands to brush there, on the jamb,
for molecules to catch. It was the surface, not the punch-line, which held true.

But then, it is not the molecules, but their electric life which forces us up,
apart,
from falling or rising. Here—one man light his cigarette, as if to pull
his sleeves up, sharpen the instant into his. A silence speaks,
free of its father guide. A woman adroit, and you, friend, quisling...

why not? Without ending, is there anyone? The child, not defined
by that moment when its parent flings it from the nest to fall
or fly, but by its parents' death. Speaking of the surfaces
of things as if we were idiots mesmerized by shiny baubles

and incapable of fear. I told the truth, once. Offhand, so that what it was
could slip into the streets, to fall, birds nuzzling themselves
in their own wings, snow reaching the velocity of rain, mistaking glass for
pool,
utterance for flight, to fall sleeping on the windshields of cars,

into the hair of the women in the grass, laughing at the boy
in the Zoot-suit standing on his head. I said: "I don't know how men speak,"
quickly started in about motors, which is how I think it happens, leaning
into engines, anything that ticks, where the heads are hidden

in enclosures of shadow. Drawn back from with a joking push,
or punch. Standing absolutely still while someone bruised to bury
what evidence there is speaks grudgingly, words opening
the strongest body like a mountain might split apart to show

a few theoretical ants, carrying black-holes into the gut of the earth
on their fractal shoulders—even the drones know what they have taken,
carrying proxies. It comes through the arm of the swarm
to the cylinder where the queen is, waiting for execution.

Somehow, the bees feel the spin of the galaxies,

weave it into their honeycombs. Admire it in the hyacinth.
I feel it, on this porch, how matter collapses, and collapses,
grinds down to a point so that ten billion stars can spin

around infinite hunger like suds at a drain. Birds feel it.
Who will I think of when the light falls into me? Not
me, I hope. Not what I've done. I have loved some men, care for
the borrowed bodies in the grass. Neither straight nor crooked,

what I am fills up with moonlight like an empty cup.

IV. EROS & PSYCHO

EROS AND PSYCHO

I.

In song only, I am sight. Lying, starlight—stash
of certainty: he comes. His fingers winds that carry earth
away from day, the sun. Blind. Cloud, come to me,
sheep of sleep, surround me with vapor, my body
clover. Certain. Mouth windcave,
my breath earth, my body broadened, lightning

tongue, then beams of light. I hear them: shale sliding over shale,
splintering, bickering, rock and woman, shard

and man. Hound and doubt—disparage. They dragged me here, in punishment. I opened, and was kindled. Dark, show me the mountain if my eyes stay closed.

II.

He enters from a window, so he must have wings.
The folded mountain of his hand, the sinew
of his fingers, always dark: forbidding me to see him.
But in his arms, I am light. I lift the lamp, watch oil,
one drop, fall to him: a paradise of shadow, feather, satin, flesh
ending at his eyes. His startled cry, instant
as his torso turns to mine and I am pushed sideways
by his wings—O dark, I see now. You have seen me.

III.

Feathers on the marble sill. Lantern igniting rings
below the pillow. Stars swinging in the moonless night:
children safe at sea in wooden sailboats with jars of lightning bugs
sealed with beeswax and cheese-cloth. And I am my hand—
a meteor, constellation to be connected and connected and connected,
pins for yarn, a wishing game and they, hidden in the surf's green fins,
fingerprints against the jars' glass,
pale green against the sails, and thinking rhythmic circuits,
mating pheromones, and preying. I am pattern, solitary lights. I drift
and flicker, keen and burn.

IN DEFENSE OF THE HANGMAN

Was it not him in the orchard pleading the hungry to fly to the apples?
What magistrate? What fisherman? Not the hangman, with his mouth full

of biscuits and goat's milk. To blame him: pissing for whisky,
chewing for sheep. Now, in the west yard, the children are looping
the masts of their sailboats with string. Are the bowers unhappy

to be ships made of paper? Is it flax that wrings, pulled tight between
thumbs?

It is difficult for wind to bring apples, for the hand on the gallows to change,
mid-career. No one will purchase the delicate threads from his baskets. So
gallant

for the woodsmen to nibble at wolves, then wave them away.
Their mouths are not big enough to chew on the bones.

AFTER LUST

I walk through snow on leaves, counting them as I go. There is dirt
buried under the sundial. Vines in the north edit the grasses,

a web that's blown in. Chill spreads, heading for the edges of that page.
I choose to move to the corner where a bowl of goldfish frozen into ice
stare up. I can see them wanting wiggle in there, fins

free to swim. Mirrored ball: what have you got for me? Dawn
fierce, following dark: the everyday? Why not stay dark,

for that would hurt me, too, without pained pupils, pull
apart their tangled nets to snare a bright light in—snow in the window
over his body. He was gone when I got back. Walls spattered with green. I
touched

them. I smiled at the water. I thought it was listening. Whisky smells
wrong on the mouths men left in the dark. I think sex each Saturday,

and seven. In the FM, not the AM. People do it all the time, not counting
checkers, groceries, well, no—all the time. Connection to each man, woman,
what have you, here on earth. Even Harry there, picking the chicken.

PARABLE

I.

The curving spine of Isaac made the sea its home. A thousand years to make the wrist-bone of a drowned man into an ivory bow, another hundred for a daughter to break free from heirlooms, dowries, fields where she ran underneath W's of crows. Bleeding

at the knees, reaching for the gate to breathe, panting for air before the great flat blue—but yesterday, a woman slipped off rings and set to scrubbing pots, steel wool in one hand

and one placed flat, first palm, then back of hand against a spotted cloth to dry. With fingers

heated red with soapy water, she turned pages and learned in fragments, in the future's way—

II.

When Isaac stood outside his father's door
the old man wept into his hands
and tore the crucifix from the lintel,
threw it into pieces on the ground. Isaac's
mother, on her knees, clawed at the rose
and rose took back its red, pulled close the branch
and squeezed. Her daughter played at moppets
in the hurried grass, their hands jerking

in their play, their downcast eyes marveled
at the dolls' long shadows in the lamp-light. Isaac
held all heaven in his arms, his legs braced
against the yellow dust determined by footprint
and the fallen bodies of its nation as it walked.
But Isaac stood, Joshua's neck twisted closed, thief
of sons in a blessed house: his father scooped
his father's grave with his bare hands, stood
inside the hole, waiting in grief for rain—
but then: dark scattering of mats, the hushed voices
of the boys, what angels would be if they were flesh,
or what light is when it lessens to be born. The old man
stood above them, tallow creeping from the flame. A dog
from down the path snapped at its tail. Kicked away,
its yelps clawed at the dark above a drunken roar,
the boy called out a name that changed pitch, whistled,
then made a hollow circle in the hiss of night.
The children stirred awake
to see. Isaac lifted up the body, leapt
into the sea, and swam.

WORRY DOLL

Worries rise early, without me, steal
to the fishing boats, crawl

under the hooks. I rise. On
the islands, they're having

fun with me over
big trays of eels

and salty beer. Me:
biting cuticles while

sailors have their way with them.

NIAGARA

Wind skids off the water, then
the water stops. It's true: daredevils
have curled into beer barrels
and been heaved downstream
to suffer bobbing to the edge,
and then plummet down. In yellow slickers,
tourists take lifts up into the river-bed
where lobbies have been carved
right up to the wall where the falls
is rushing. The doors slide open.
They walk forward, watching white
water drop, mill about within its crash,
its rainbow without natural light to squeeze
the spectrum from its drops. If a person
stays long enough, depending on the guide,
they can drown the river out, and close
their eyes: there are other cities
where longer water falls more fiercely,
thousands where a traveler stands and sees
two nations from one point spread
purple blankets littered from the dated toys
of human cities, but here: Americans and Canadians
compete with gravity to be
most crazy, passionate or free. They blow in,

in drifts from recent centuries
beneath pink neon hearts and justice-
s of peace to mingle families against the wishes
of those families: the motor lodge, motel
or hotel, car where new-bound
couples drop their bouquets on green
carpeting and fuck for the first time
lawfully, or solitary
public
bodies give those bodies
up.

JACK FROST TAPS AND ENTERS

It snows in Sweden, and herring hide
underneath: mouthing bubbles
filled with echoes of rumors of tin cans,
the paring knives of pale men. In hillsides,

cramped in clay, rabbits creak apart,
groggy with fossilization. If there were bellies between bones
they'd snap at roots, call in their little ones
to rest inside them. Then, they don't know dark

or any sun, nuzzle through twilight. I kneel, cup in my hands
to hear them shake with rage, remembering
the bleating and the horns. I hear
the horse-shoes rattle cobblestone against the switch

that the little boy stripped smooth with his father's blade.
What would an empty circle be to me, now
my father's age when I was fathered? Human child
spinning to be bull, gnu or swallow hollowed of its call,

whatever you are now, boy, be. Someday, you may find
your chest changed into the circle of your plan,
edge, spin, a crumbling century blurring in your middle.

THE MOON ON ALL SAINT'S DAY

Old friend, you've followed me a bit too long. In the ring around you
I can see no rain: a business descends into the marketplace, but then

the awnings close, as squash blossoms close, and he appears. I must
begin again. The streets are dark and slow with feathers from a pillow

that has burst open from a grimy truck's back door. A frost
is in the lenses of the headlights of the starting cars but melts

quick enough away. Grasses masked in sugars, maples bleeding musk for
me,
as if I cared. The river hollows out its sleeve, pulls trout to sea. I don't care

how morning reinvents itself. I don't care for making lonely bodies
out of snow. I can't have rum mixed into something spicy. Leave those
trousers

where they are. A man, hunched, cups his hand over his hand,
and strikes a match. Or no, he enters blowing on his fingers. I have been so
far.

V. Traveler in Autumn

WHEN PINHEADS HAVE A PARTY

When pinheads have a party, nobody
brings their own. Nobody
comes. Who started out Grandmaster Phun
snuggles up with pumpkins, shrinky
dinks curling on the pan. Doze out
twiddling thumbs to funk, giggling
as the gimp girls giggle, pass
a beer between them, lamenting dearth
of circuses. The girls all think it's great
to be the first to bone
but worry daddy's at the door, stub
their lipsticks in the lock.
A damp boy scratches in the corner,
boasts of being moist. Pass the gum.
Billy's at the window with his bowling bag,
hoisted in: he's got the Moxie, cheez kurls
and the Polaroid. Jeep is buzzing
quick with jolt, holds the ladder

like a steering wheel. What's that
you said? 20 times, boy. Yes. I saw it.
Ultimate. "Eraserhead." Jeep
would jump Billy, but the Band-Aids
loose. Minnie isn't listening,
practicing piano in the living room, distracting
mama at her crossword
with "You've Got a Friend," with "Fire
& Rain," "Peace Train,"
and "Mandy." Ink spatters pink
erasing six down, kind of salted
meat and three across, baby rabbit. Thank God
for Granny. Billy burns
his elbow on the hot-plate, skids
carpet with his face, which needs
the work. Jeep, downstairs, feeling
Randy, who's a little high, holding
green potato to his lips, his fingers
in the squishy parts. Jeep slaps it
from his hands. "Damn boy! That shit
is nasty." "My head is cotton candy.
Bite." Awright. Awright, who's lookin'?
Minnie's losing grounthe bumblebee is nearly hived,
she's only got a minutewaltz to plunk before the lifeboat
so to speak, in Randy's pants, is sunk.
If there was God, boys and girls could
bump caboose, bang their braces
into sparks. Yeah, right. Jeep snaps
off the light and chomps a Certs.

TRAVELER IN AUTUMN

The scarecrow's shadow leans over the harbor,
a mile of black slapping its copper bell for you,
thrown out to be drowned—then, clamped in fangs
and brought back by the dogfish, to be buried in a phantom turf

and disregarded for another bone. Your shoes are safe,
but then, who needs your feet? And see—
chipmunks sew the sock into the foot, chatter
at the ass with its eyelid flattened to the moon, gourd

huge above the carcass. Bones left over by pitchforks
munching the goldenrod. Here is your pumpkin skin
shirt. Here is your yellow hood, the one
the sisters took with them into the aviary. Inside,

in felt pockets, perfumed songs are trembling.
The star above the mountain stays where your hand
would be if you were rising, and the candle
over the parted lips—covered with brightness

before returning to its wax—lost to oxygen. Think
of the ceaseless division of amoebas or frozen bacterium—
and even if you had floated—just having eyes
was reason enough to finish and dissipate.

THREE LAWS

The laws of YHWH and the laws of man
seek convictions of a different sort,
and hinge upon our placement in a facile plan.

Seek love with a conviction in a startled plan
that lies, surprised from words, to rise to higher courts
than the laws of YHWH or the laws of Man.

Its paws were bright with blood, speckled with sand
as it swims the moat of your besieged fort,
rises clean. A sedative syringe to halt its agile plans

to take you, flesh first, marrowbone and gland
until your heart dangles, bald, and the steaming beast snorts,
knowing nothing of the laws of YHWH or of Man.

It does not drop. Will devour what it can,
gnawing at the sinew, tossing your skull for sport.
Love hinges upon my life and its one fragile plan,

an anarchy of love I freely give for rule of Man.
The murderers of heretics I surrender to the meager courts
that cede the laws of YHWH for the laws of Man,
impinging on my life within its fragile, cracking plans.

BIRDHOUSE

The homestead might be a cuckoo clock
emasculated of its pendulum
of pine-cones, without its face: instead,
round holes bored through the facade
as big as old-style silver
half-dollars. The dollar birds are bigger,
bullies by default of size, and must
scramble for the seed
(sesame, and what have you)
that drops from beaks or feet
into the clover, far below. Swallows
light upon the wooden beam
and squeeze inside, hunching
their bones together like collapsible
camera stands surrounded by brown
down, hour glasses whose tiny middles pinch
further back, toward their talons—
but the feed is not so delicate,
nor feeding birds so fragile. They
squawk inside, almost flinging
the pellets into the air for them
to drop, clicking into gullet,
then again into their bellies,
hollow balls of tuft
propped up on gnarled feet. There must
be four of them inside,
in the dark, chirping
boasts of eggs: bluest that has ever been,
shiny and spotted as the freckles

on a red-haired human's hands, cracked open,
sensing a lack of perfection. Birds
must take their progeny
more seriously than we,
excuse me, you, who have, most recently,
sublimated flock for bigger schemes,
would move to appease
the company, or machine,
our incorporated mothers. Look,
one of them is done, pokes out its head,
twitching, having filled, pours
forth the other side, a little fatter than it was
but still capable of pouring through. Do
you wonder if they fly out of the other side
upside down, in China time? Do dodoes do?

MIDDLE AGED SOULS

Quick to please, he hurtled
through centuries, wheezing,
bumping into poltergeists: the birth of pets,
warfare in the Pyrennees,

and if not for elephants,
then a painter by the Seine
dangling her fingers in a soldier's glass:
slap & tickle, slap

and then: gone again.
He sucks his puff, rolls his scroll,
kneads his bread, falls through in beer: enough,
he shouts, in anger, at the cantaloupe

that beaned him back
into traffic and the whistle
of the cops: almost there, he said,
I'm almost gone,

but then a baby screams—
a piglet's nosing under truffles squeal—
its mother turned her head.
He's dead. Alas, he's halfway done.

AUBADE

Hot as tongue-tied dogs, we twitched cuffs,
ripped up our faces with his hands and fed them
to the other him, licking

what we remembered of each other
from around the nails, the knuckles—but stop, look about,
the blurred kitchen swerves into focus,

and do what? Sip coffee under banners
while cool coaches pass, ladies
waving their white gloves, smearing lipstick

while staring into the glare
of their reflections in men's helmets? Help
me tell you what I had for lunch, why

I was late for checkers with the nurse,
what it is that holds my breath
for me while I am drinking. Howdy, gorgeous,

could have been the punk consultant,
my nipples dimpled with silver penguins, pointy,
always pleased beneath my plaid lapels. Hey, hey,

I know, forbidden things: what I did
before I dressed, before the suit was on, before
I wept. We arch like animals and belch

out orders from the curb, we raise our fists
against the embryonic gods
of your apologies, the Murrays

making their estate—your mommy calls.
I answer by accident. You look at me, suddenly
a repairman handing the phone to you

across the wrenches, with your bathrobe on.

NUANCES ON A THEME BY STEVENS III

*The light is like a spider.
It crawls over the water.
It crawls over the edges of the snow.
It crawls under your eyelids
And spreads its webs there—
Its two webs.*

"Tattoo," Wallace Stevens, Harmonium

The dark is full of apples, gasoline and grass, and thin
with cold that blows the ripened summer gone.
Sunlight on two eyelids glowing red on black,
burning the carnival of phosphenes off.

In tents along the river, families laugh at bears
rocking on their hind legs, with their forepaws free,
pitiful and asking alms from men with whips.
The children tug at mother's hem for dimes,

and she yanks the snoring father's tie
and prods him into staring groggily at the circus games.
Outside, the pensive blackbird builds
a ladder out of croak and climbs it with his wings,

to phone-lines, branches, smoking blue
alive with cinders from the factories. And see,
there is moonlight bouncing on the curling leaves,
and sunlight swats the birds of conscience

from their perch. Sunlight filtered
through thin flesh, poured through forgetfulness,
breezes billowing damp cloth and hair,
the sieves of memory, the fragmented

webbing of the eyelids spun from one gust to another,

then grown still, pulsing in veins, spun
and anchored to two shafts of light,
and in the webs the faces of a family,

hung drowsing there, jewels in filaments too fine to see.

CORPORATE HUG

Mosquito is sitting at the table, watching crumbs.
When he is done, he watches the shadows of the crumbs.
The shadows get longer away from the light-bulb,
and he knows something, says to the bread: *"Lois,"*

he says, *"May I call you Lois?"*
The loaf is happy in its baggy, says nothing.
"I had to put the head back onto the body.
"I had to do that so's I could drop the body.

"Are you happy here?" Mosquito stares at the bread,
resentful at it for being pre-sliced. Cheese, as they say,
is proof of the conspiratorial nature of cows,
proof of the plausibility of amnesty,

a creamy treat in an unnecessary visit. The old man
comes in, picks him up like a souvenir, holds him
to the light, shakes his body to watch the snow fly:
"Let me tell you a secret," he whistles,

"People are out to get you. Don't trust the manger.
"There are places that pay you to sit all day
"getting big idears. The military is an example
"of what is necessary to stop people like that."

SALT PARALYSIS

I.

I was waiting on the rock, sleeping through the amusements.
When I woke, there was something new again, little man—
O no no no, you are a big man, aren't you? Count the yellow shinies
on the carousel while I frisk the horses. Are you coming?

The air this summer smells of French Fries drenched in vinegar,
not the unctuous blooming of muskmelon blossom, or skunk cabbage.
When my grandfather was a lad, all the men wore knickers
of red and white stripes, had handlebar mustaches,

smoked pipes of aromatic tobaccos while they whistled
and compared bunions through the scissored-holes
in their black shoes on Sunday. On Monday, they were
screwing each other, as per usual, and blaming the government.

I am used to your body, the heft of you, the musk
of your calves and the drool on my pillow. We
could have had the time of our lives if I had been
home. But there I was, on the rock, as roman candles

bit at a black cloud, blew a hole through it, waited for birds.

II.

I am standing on the high ledge, guessing the water.
My name is Elbowmouth. It is always the same sea down there,
bringing in polished triangles of glass, the oval stones.
It has a bottom, it is no mystery. It rolls like countryside

but the water jumps, erratically, evenly, above them.
I have seen films of what lives there. I have swallowed
the least animate of my cousins raw, with a little sherry.
I have paddled around, bobbed with the waves

at the shallowest edges of that unendurable sound,
and afraid to swim, afraid of crawling back dripping to land
to meet the faces of the children playing at their pails
and the beer-soft voices of their parents. I have stayed

between them. I can see the wood slats of the walkway
and the ridiculous fences protecting the dune grass. I can see
the dark glass of street lamps gauging twilight for the moment
to shine. Behind me, three elements, waiting for fire.

III.

I have been standing here a long time.
Wave to me from the lobster shack,
your brown wrist twisted into a clean, white rope
of the \$2.00 sailor's bracelet. Kill anything

you please, and don't please me. There are boats
named by blinking lights, silver on silver

in fog on the farthest horizon, rising
from my feet to the place above my head
a heavier, darker storm curves in to punch the sea—

at my feet, a tiny crab
spins in the water, curled into itself,
a pinch of rheumatism. Only the darkest specks
of onyx in the sand are apparent in the fog,
my feet are slippered with slippery tongues
of kelp, Styrofoam bubbles it would hurt my jaw
to blow. I cannot breathe
seeing the waves flash like that, a clear hill,
a curl of porcelain, then gone, nothing,
without attachment from the fog,
I see now why he makes
his awkward animals from soft metals.

IV.

The sand traps and the hungry children
make their way along the port.
Far away, the sea gives up against the heat
but we lose sight of its defeat:
sea and sky are one there,
before the sun moves down to prove
there is an edge. These kids

have hearts in them, bright plums
in complete shadow in the bird-like bones
their ribs are, in their flowering veins.
Tapping the washed up wood,
bleached and hollow sticks
against a dead shark's side,

they leap back, expecting
the old fish to snarl at them
and snap at their fragile ankles.
Kids, I envy you. You cannot see
the blood in you, where it has come from,
and where it longs to be.

LOVE SONG

What is my body doing on your bed? I used to think
that quilt was something warm, but I crawled under it and bled
almost to death. Almost to death is quite enough for me—

if it's not one thing its another. Downstream, the farmyard
quickens, a mare shakes her mane, blows rings of steam through nostrils
edged with ice. A horse is what a horse does

when it doesn't sleep. I have to say the farmer
is a little hungry lying in the field, dreaming of machines,
dreaming of hammers squeaking nails out of houses

of laborers scrambling to realign their hands.
Are you lonely? I am lonely, you look lonely there
like me, and you know

you know better if we are full, at odds with all
my fingers do, the bald nuts surrounding bolts,
the happy lathe, the embracing god of slaves

and would you tell slaves now
that their god was built to keep them quiet?
Or tell them that there is nothing, no hope of light,

and set them to their wheels, sparks, their bleeding palms?
There is an image most would understand.
Every mother is crying over the broken body of a son,

and what has broken it? Its life in death?
Its reiteration of alienating theories? Hear my hands
on your nipples twist a squeak from you,

your soft hands twisting in the light like pointy worms.
I will kiss you, naked body, take you in. The snow
flies sideways outside. My own pipes are frozen.

STUBS

I.

What better word for love than “castanets”?
What dowager would do for this line of bandaged
travelers counting their fingers angrily,

clenching their toes to be calm?
Outside, a city fumes for coffee, in,
fills up its windows with a winter pink,

a frigid blue, then gray and white
where bark of trees and dogs
should be, collecting at a fox

beneath the stalling hooves
and flung gloves of aristocracy: hunters,
and their counterparts: police.

II.

Forget the smile, folded up like shells,
passports, the beer-ringed paperback: bus
travel cemented this loss of common touch,
theories of humane workings in the human heart.

Chicago. After Cleveland, that restroom
and the rubber plants beneath the water stains,
four chunks of muscle flapping blood into tubes,

rain in your sails, ongoing love. Think
about feather-beds, two bodies (one being yours)
at ease by telephone, with laundry bags, with cups
of boiling water to each cup of rice

above a ring of pale blue flame. I buckle up,
I check the map, it's there beneath my lips
holding my teeth in place, it changes borders
when I bite into ice cream cones—I watch

the girlfriends with their boyfriends
bang their braces against the gates. The drivers
poke their tongues out to catch the sparks, throw
them change, make wishes. But I am just

this guy. I know how the cities feel: you brace
against the breeze, each surface prone to rain. Something
happens in you, under you, you're upside down,
and just when you reach balance, you: you're Buffalo.

VI. A Lunar Romeo

WEST AT CROSSROADS

I.

The crawling cry for all of us. The kick
of sand against a camel's back. The cur
completed by the barking bone.

II.

I have been undressing for the dark.
Hold me. Who is this? Do you know?
(A hand following my spine, the old mountain
ridge of it. The edge of ear. The mouth.)
Make something of this sound, the force
that I am changing for—don't lag—
make nothing of the sun, as if you owed it.
Who are you? Why is this skin bracing for me
by the blending into it? Nothing will prepare you.
The door swinging open on the oiled hinge,
birds fluttering together in the triangles of light,
breaking—breaking—feathers lifting, drifting down.

III.

Forget the word "America." Begin. Feel
your hand pressing your knee, can you
see whose body begins here? The cup
along the light—the water near the air—
leave them at the table. Reach in,
beneath the bone, between, within the marrow,
catch at the swarming symbiotes there—
the wing. The wag of flagellates. The bone
building from itself for blood. The gasp
of oxygen inside the lung, squeezed
from the heart. Hear this? I hear it. Hear
the muddy branching of your veins
spread free, the writhings and the branchings

of the forward hopping man. Hear him.
Astounded, she and me progress and blend.
Fell back. Forget who listens. Look.

IV.

Quick. Come inside. A hand across the forehead,
pushing back her hair. *Come here*—(behind her
dark is green behind/below the rain, the leaves
thick with summer storms sipped upward

through their trunks. The sap of maple
sticks in the spigot by the bridge. She tells me this,

shaking her slicker free of rain.)—*How long*
must I stand here, shaking? *How long? How?*
She shakes her head and brushes back
the black strands with her fingers, says:
Why are you standing there? There is no time to wait.
Two flickers: lightning bug. Then: thunder.

V.

I have called acquaintances to wield for me.
The silent pen. Forget who begs. I hear the drum.
The skip and tickle of the wheezing heart.
The pleats are bleating, too. It smokes too much.

VI.

I called out from the bridge: O sight,
what have you done to me? I catch the gnat
uncertain at my nostrils with an open palm.
So that's who holds this face: the broken instrument,
the man ascertained what? The chime of sacrament?
The boards are loaded, thus: the feet of animals,
down here on my side, they waddle stupidly
past what I fear the most. He watches them.

VII.

No night for the fools. They beg me: give a kiss?
Who speaks for lips like these? Who mates
with bread and wine? I pull my fingers from his lips
who knows the least of me. See how
the fingers shine? The warmth of drunken mouths,
the eyes of brandished dogs sparking in halogen.

VIII.

The license of the gun burns like a paper doll:
the catch who carries me. Carrion cajoling me.
In the photon's burst, that would be bits of me.
And so: the rotting stump. So: lichen, fall.
And if for this one instant I am the lens for what
can never rest in me, become possessed by it.

It crashes in my ribs, I could barely stand
against its booming in the tubes. It's nothing. Ecstasy.

IX.

The bones who fooled a king. The sack
of what got lost. Who held the laces shut?
Who pulled the ribbon up? No matter
who did this. The cloth is racing free,
shredding, pulling off and away from the gnashing teeth.

X.

The hold-out. Clear-cut answering. The plans.
The highway where the heads hang from the poles.
The wind, blowing at their greasy hair, cannot push
their frozen expressions off into the light. The barns
and hills. The bales of hay. Horizons
and the plenitude of lakes in which the moonlight swims.
Why must I say anything? You see. Or do you?
Don't watch, look. Don't look, know. There,
what's there? The roads are bare. The wind is blowing.
The girls are playing princess on the hill.

The president guns at the motor with his heel.
He is a broken boy, ambassador to no one,
leather-jacketed and certain in his fear.
The creaking of his knees. The surge of cock
against the zipper frightens him from shelter.
The growl and chase. The bite and play.
The awkward copulation of the dogs beneath the heads.

XI.

Girders going nowhere. Bridges over ruins. Guns.
Sparrows twittering at mortars, singing for seeds
that are moving through the streets in bodies
tended to by bandits in ambulances. I could
be anyone and yet you come.
I wanted what you have for me before you sleep,
and still I change. I will hold your body for you
while you sleep. I cannot bear the sheets
unless they smell like me, until I have turned
their smell of wind and sunlight out for good.
I am almost like a man. I have a hat.
I have a stomach ache. I hate the day.
When I am in the road among them, they are sweet
in their indifference, or their
stern efforts not to laugh at me.
I am down upon my luck. I am awake.

XII.

The door I could have been. The splintered plane.
The coats sweeping on their hangers where my hand sweeps,
snagging on the shadows, the half-light

where I have placed myself.
If only I could see what he is doing
from a height, swim down to comfort him
with whispers. What I have learned in flight,
what I will become in time.

The papers

underneath them in the boxes are what's left of me,
and I love the ready to be buttoned over me,
for whatever shape I take. The weather I will bear.
The air I have to breathe. The grime of what I do.
I will hurt them as they fray and fade with use.
You see, you have to say, they all depend on you.

XIII.

The current moves through what you think
might be the cord. If it would brighten things along the way,
if it would only burn—the Atlantic lit from underneath it
with nets of incandescent green, flickering. Clouded over
by the frightened changes of great dynasties
of fish, turning over at night, swimming upside down
to catch electric illumination on their switching tails—

capsizing right-side-up in waves as the true sun
gropes across dark water. Inch by inch to charm the shore.
You could be afraid. Yes. That thing could happen.
See what the day has done? It has caught everything:
caught there in the bright of it, who wouldn't want the shade
of stonework, tree, umbrella, or one's face

to bring us back to sleep. Who are you anyway?
Was that you I saw on Saturday, your hand trembling
at the knob, your other hand steady, opened to a cup
beneath the chute where seeds and sturdy cereals poured forth
for you to feed what prowled, locked behind the cages,
gazed at foolishly from false promontories and bluffs—
the stinking bears. the urine splashing monkey. What?
Who are you? Will you come with me if I lead?—

then come. Forget the handful of bribery you've purchased
with your coins. Leave it (only a second before their frenzied
swooping) for the birds. Let your hand be naked
near their mouths. Watch my hand upon the railing
gliding dry along the metal. I can see my face
clearly, its reflection flat, diagonal, in the scratched surface
of my watch. You are there, too, blown sideways

from the end of the great impasse or the bridge
my arm will be. Flies darting there like crows. Fussing.
Flying off, dissatisfied with the taste of salt and soap

that mixes on my flesh. They have no need of crossing.

Here we are. Now are you with me? Off. It is fine
to see yourself as food. There is no reason for your fear.
Now, come now. Be a sport. Reach out to him—
well then, / will touch the tiger. He has lain silent

in the sun, no sound has stirred him. Has he
been dreaming of our bodies? Has he been left,
a cargo, a memento, evaporating from its bones, bristling
in the heat? Will he reek of something frightening? Why
do I ask? His enormous nostrils: still. The head is silent
on its paws. The great stones baking in the sun.
His thick eyelids: opening.

STEREOPTICON

A wing with shadows falls. The dude reclines against the rock,
picks his teeth with straw. "Good work," he says. The rattlesnake
wags its body full of beads. It smells the dark. "Climb into your mouth,"
cowpoke hissed, and pulled the dying snake up to his lips,
tore scales lengthwise from noisemaker, spilling its guts in sage.
The moon, brass button with its surface scratched, laughed at him
wrestling his sleeve on the rented stage. The coyot' gnashed
its jaws off from its head to flick them to the buzzards. Honeysuckle.
Scorpions voiceless in dark, chartreuse beneath the black light
of the bug chaser's lantern. Tick. Tick. Tick. The mule thrice bitten.
The ladies in their calico bonnets beating at the appaloosa's
afterbirth so that it won't flick into the wind to steal their breathing.

THE MOON ON NEW YEAR'S DAY

How bright the half-moon is! How bright the corridor...
no man follows now, nor woman stalls. It was

enough to have been here. I loved this table:
inch thick oak, its corner snapped off, cracked completely

one-third through, along its length. A heavy door. Stained
with circles of a dozen suns left by pot bottoms dropped

for the relief of pipe cold water. A serrated blade
by onions: rings. Replies to letters from friends of friends.

In pomp, missed perfume in the collars of the crowds,
familiar music holding me still, staying the light:

halved: fell water, and water: not enough. I press my forearms
into wood, to be convinced. Fold, wings. Let me

flutter down into the shade of hives and thickets,
voice pulled free of throat. If I were cloud, I would crave the eyes

of cattle. I would be all vertical and branching, simultaneous
in dark. I claw the vacuum losingly with ink,

remain a man pinching a pen. To have hinges,
hammered open. To be powdered into hues.

I have made metal cold, splintered in my blood. A stallion
shakes the nag of industry from its neck. See? I hook

my thumbs into my ears: the sound is inside, and humming
my jawbone into grist. There is nothing, nothing

on the ground, no law to hold my body now from cold.
And now: the light. Watch the tracks of what

truly has been hammered, what exorcised. Sniff at my hands:
they smell of soap, and smoke. It was the first kiss, then,

just the echo of a question against windows: is there no out,
following this? No? I am so hungry. Was that your

breath against the glass?